DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 292 133 CS 506 019

AUTHOR Antczak, Frederick J.
TITLE Rhetoric and Character: Ethical Criticism in the Narrative Paradigm.
PUB DATE [87]
NOTE 48p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Discourse Analysis; *Ethics; Moral Issues; *Narration; Persuasive Discourse; Rhetoric; *Rhetorical Criticism; Rhetorical Invention
IDENTIFIERS *Discourse Aims; Discourse Modes; Narrative Text

ABSTRACT

One alternative approach for assessing the moral quality of public argument in liberal democracy is narrative ethics, based not in procedural rationality but in narrative, with a concern for character and community. To be intelligible and practicable, such criticism shifts the focus of ethics from discrete decisions and actions to questions of character. In the narrative vision and language of character in community, the ethical dimension of texts can be objects of analysis genuinely open to debate in a way that sustains and extends the community of discourse and its critical capacities to hold texts and the characters they realize accountable. Rhetoric as a practice of accountability is designed to keep the conversation focused, and to keep it continually developing its capacities to give compelling and decisive accounts. This accountability is possible only because of the shift in focus of ethical criticism from procedural rationality to the narratives of vision and character in these communities of discourse. Ethical criticism works from an ethics that makes sense only in a rational world paradigm of communication, where the stories of character are central, and where only in its moral vision could they have their meaning and rationale. (Fifty-eight footnotes are appended.) (MM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED292133

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Frederick J. Antczak

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Rhetoric and Character:

Ethical Criticism in the Narrative Paradigm

Frederick J. Antczak

Department of Rhetoric and
Communication Studies
The University of Virginia

We tell each other stories in order to live.
--Joan Didion

CS506017

Rhetoric and Character:
Ethical Criticism in the Narrative Paradigm

> The true test of a civilization
> is not the census nor the size of cities
> nor the crops, but the kind of man
> the country turns out.
> --Ralph Waldo Emerson

Most attempts at assessing the moral quality of public argument in liberal democracy have been based in what Walter Fisher[1] has called the "rational world paradigm." Dennis Day, Thomas Nilsen, even John Rawls have justified procedures that are intelligible and practicable only under rationalistic assumptions about human agency and moral language. This paper is an attempt to sketch an alternative, based not in procedural rationality but in narrative. To be intelligible and practicable, such criticism shifts the focus of ethics from discrete decisions and actions to questions of character.

Part I:
Procedure and the Problem of Accountability

> To identify an occurrence as an action
> is in the paradigmatic instances to
> identify it under a type of description
> which enables us to see that occurrence
> as flowing intelligibly from a human
> agent's intentions, motives, passions
> and purposes. It is therefore to
> understand an action as something for
> which someone is accountable, about
> which it is always appropriate to ask
> the agent for an intelligible account.
> --Alasdair MacIntyre

Ethics of public argument in liberal democracy have identified ethics closely with the law, with procedures of inclusion into the process of debate and decision, greatly to the deemphasis if not the exclusion of determining ways of accountability to which the partici-

pants in the process must be obligated in order to sustain and extend it. No substantive focus of accountability is necessary, since the best test of truth is simply "the power of the thought to get accepted in the competition of the market."[2] There may arise, as Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes opines, narrowly defined circumstances in which freer speech would constitute a "clear and present danger"[3]: shouting "fire" in a crowded theater and the like. In these rare cases, the uninhibited robust exchange of ideas must be limited in order to preserve the integrity of the process of debate and decision. But for all other cases, including those that are apparently dangerous or distasteful or that otherwise raise ethical issues, to delimit the free market of ideas would be, as Justice Frankfurter put it, "to burn the house to roast the pig."[4] Of course even the free market of ideas "may not produce the truth, or the whole truth all the time, or often, or in some cases ever"; still the procedures maximizing debate and opening the market to its practical utmost perform a valuable function, since "there is no other system which will normally and habitually find so much truth,"[5] as well as so much of everything else. Problems still arise in the marketplace[6] but in the procedural view they are not problems with its essential concept of openness. The best way to address problems in civic discourse is simply to extend that discourse further. As Justice Brandeis put it: "the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence. Only an emergency can justify repression."[7] Thus in the procedural view, what is ethically problematic is the exclusion of opinions, be it by Plato or Lenin or Andrea Dworkin or Edwin Meese or anyone else, because of the content of those opinions. Holding the opinions accountable for their

content is not properly an ethical issue.

For Dennis G. Day, in fact, liberal democratic communities are ethical precisely insofar as their procedures turn away from such substantive exclusion, or more exactly turn away from substance entirely. "Democracy as a political philosophy does not specify what the good life is, rather it provides the methodological framework within which each individual may seek to fulfill his own conception of the good life." Thus Day argues that democracy implies nothing more and nothing other than the "overriding ethical responsibility to promote the full confrontation of opposing opinions, arguments and information relevant to decision.[8] The moral essence of rhetoric in democracy is the full confrontation of views in each decision; hence the ethics of rhetoric are those procedures, and for public purposes only those procedures, by which each confrontation is facilitated and maximized. Because of the "moral priority of decision by debate," morality inheres in the procedures as such, insofar as they promote inclusion in the decision. Day claims, "the decision-making process guarantees our moral integrity by guaranteeing the opportunity to debate for a reversal of the decision."[9] No ethical concern, therefore, attaches to the substance of the opinions included in the debate or the substance of the decisions reached by the debate. Moral integrity inheres in the process of decision, not in the agent's substantive commitments that bring him or her to participation in that process in a particular way.

Professor Day is laudable for the sheer implacability with which he follows this principle out. Procedures for him are to play a sheerly descriptive role in ordering and umpiring the conversation,

never also a substantive role in evaluating it. This brings him to observe that appeal to reason itself is an improper criterion to impose, "is inconsistent with the ethics of democratic discourse. The ethics of democratic discourse require a commitment to debate, not a commitment to reason."[10] Democratic discourse is not committed to any particular substantive language or vision of the situation at hand that prompts the discussion and is seen to call for decision.

The problem is that Day can therefore offer no help in defining and justifying the basic notions of his procedures, notwithstanding the prospect that definitions may be needed in order for those notions to be intelligible and practicable. What is interesting linguistically and ethically is that there are considerable problems of definition that cannot be resolved in any unambiguously and uncontroversially "factual" way. What, for example, is to count as an opinion? Shall we give a respectful share of our finite time to grunts, unintelligible babbling, obscenities, threats, artificially synthesized sound patterns? What precisely is the "full confrontation" of opinions? By what criteria can the end of a debate be determined? When and how does the extension of a debate, especially in the case of time-sensitive issues, become in effect an act of obstructing decision by debate, filibustering rather than facilitating it?

Nor does Day help in suggesting how, or even when, such determinations are made. How will "time-sensitive issues" be recognized? How often and under what circumstances may a question be reopened without undermining the authority of debate and the reasons for which people will take the trouble to participate in it? What (if any) burdens of proof will be enforced, and how are they to be justified?

What is it to decide a question, what kind of authority will we accord such a decision, on what grounds may already-made decisions properly be challenged-as with fallible human beings doing the deciding they sometimes have to and ought to be-and discussion be reopened? How is such discourse to be given an account, held accountable? In sum, when we invoke "free speech" or "free debate" or "free choice" in answering these questions, what do we mean by freedom?

A variety of substantively different answers can be and have been given in democratic cultures to these sorts of questions. It is clear that if the procedures are to be practiced, some definition will in effect be given. But in each of these matters Day is prevented from determining the authority of fundamental definitions. His ethics are specifically structured to play no part in generating the overall moral vision in which these issues are to be recognized and given argumentative focus. But unless Day can help us determine what fundamental moral notions might mean and the ways in which they are and are not to apply, not only in accounting for a particular authorial decision but across the indefinite variety of cases that confront the ongoing community of criticism, his ethics would not be able to sustain and extend a focused account of the process of decision, of the continuity of authority as decisions unfold, of the relative quality of these decisions or of their subsequent interpretation and application. For Day, ethics in no way concern questions of the continuing and developing critical community or the possibilities of character within it. Ethics are about maximizing inclusion for each debate, not for deciding what is to be taken for authoritative there and why. It is precisely on this point that more conservative proceduralists find Day

inadequate. The most thorough and thoughtful alternative is advanced by Thomas R. Nilsen. Where for Day the issue is purely descriptive, and more debate is better debate, Nilsen offers an apparently more substantive alternative: better debate is that which leads to more significant choice.

> It is choice-making that is voluntary, free from physical or mental coercion. It is choice based on the best information available when the decision must be made. It includes knowledge of various alternatives and the possible long- and short-term consequences of each. It includes awareness of the motivations of those who want to influence, the values they serve, the goals they seek. Voluntary choice also means an awareness of the forces operating within ourselves.

In this view,

> the ethical issues are whether the information present is the most relevant available and is as complete as the particular circumstances make possible...the listeners must not be led to believe that they are getting a more complete and accurate picture than they really are. In addition, the subject must be placed in the proper perspective as far as its individual and social importance is concerned. In brief, the speaker must provide for the listener as adequate a grasp of the truth of the situation as is reasonably possible under the circumstances. 11

Clearly Nilsen's ethics is considerably more complicated than Day's, the procedures considerably more elaborated. But ultimately even Nilsen, perhaps the most careful of the proceduralists, confronts the same problem of definition that Day faced, for the significance of choice is still to be described in terms of procedural guidelines, however more fully detailed. Nilsen's procedures provide no help in determining definitions for his fundamental moral notions, or even guidelines for how and when they are to be invoked: "voluntary", "coercion", "best information", "knowledge", "various", "consequences", "most relevant", "complete", "feasible", "accurate",

"proper perspective" and "reasonably possible" for a start. Without some way of determining what such fundamental moral notions might mean and the ways in which they are and are not to apply in the indefinite variety of cases that might come up, his ethics would not be able to sustain and extend beyond each discrete instance a focused account of the process of debate, the continuity of its authority as decisions unfold, the relative quality of the resulting decisions or of their subsequent interpretation and application.

Neither Nilsen nor Day find these questions of vision--questions of how ethical issues are to be brought into, and kept in, focus--ethically controversial. It is of course admissible that such questions be debated, but procedures should remain ever uncommitted in such debate. Nilsen and Day leave the substantive definition of fundamental moral notions outside the scope of ethical practice. Their ethics instead focus on inclusiveness and openness in each debate. In each debate we are free to choose our substantive moral notions; it is not within the purview of Ethical procedures to have a commitment with respect to such choice. Procedural ethics that are focused on particular choices refrain from defining the fundamental notions necessary for moral account, refrain from invoking a substantive moral vision[12] in terms of which to focus accounts. In other words, procedural ethics cannot recognize any authoritative ethos or rhetoric, any authoritative critical community, any authoritative way of critical life in language.

This limitation obtains even for that most resourceful of proceduralists, John Rawls. Rawls's is the most elegant attempt to escape the procedural focus on particular decision and to construct an

authoritative moral vision--or rather, THE universal, objective, timeless moral vision--purely procedurally. Justice is seen as a kind of bargaining game conducted behind a "veil of ignorance" where the parties do not know any of their particular circumstances: they "do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case and they are obliged to evaluate principles solely on the basis of general considerations." Rawls makes the parties ignorant of a whole range of facts and values:

> no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength and the like. Nor, again, does anyone know his conception of the good, the particulars of his rational plan of life, or even the special features of his psychology such as his aversion to risk or liability to optimism or pessimism. More than this, I assume that the parties do not know the particular circumstances of their own society. That is, they do not know its economic or political situation, or the level of civilization and culture it has been able to achieve. The persons in the original position have no information as to which generation they belong. 13

The individual self is detached from its own particular story and is left with its unaccountable preferences to make its particular choices without respect to any meaning its particularity might give these choices. For Rawls, the moral point of view is constituted insofar as the moral vision excludes particularity, insofar as it is blind to story, to unfolding character, to the peculiar constituting and history of the community, in short to narrative.

But precisely in the effort to provide a universal moral perspective, Rawls gives us instead an inhuman (or perhaps a-human) one; in his procedures, distinctively human moral problems go out of focus for purposes of substantive definition.

> Rawls conceives of the moral point of view as an atemporal vantage from which, like Lucretius gazing down upon the plain of battle, we contemplate all time and all space equanimously and isotopically...But human existence is not accidentally temporal; it is essentially temporal...The veil of ignorance creates a choice situation in which the <u>essential</u> characteristics of human existence are set aside along with accidents of individual variations. What results, it seems to me, is not a moral point of view, but a non human point of view from the perspective of which moral questions are not clarified but warped and distorted. 14

The distinctive thing about human beings is that the existentially and historically particular and the ethically essential are inextricably linked. By being alienated from one's own story, one loses sight of his or her character <u>as human</u>; one loses sight of and reference to the distinctive possibilities and meanings on which his or her agency operates. But it is only with respect to one's story, the narrative of one's character, that the distinctive moral decisions one sees himself or herself confronting and the actions one chooses to do can accurately be given account. For "to identify an occurrence as an action is in the paradigmatic instances to identify it under a type of description which enables us to see that occurrence as flowing intelligibly from a human agent's intentions, motives, passions and purposes. It is therefore to understand an action as something for which someone is accountable, about which it is always appropriate to ask the agent for an intelligible account.[15] But authoritative ethical accounts can only be generated with reference to the narrative that brings the agent, in his particular character, and the community which is the implicit audience of his accounts, to recognize how the situation calls for decision and to see how the envisionable alternatives for action have different ethical quality.

It may be the most significant lesson Rawls's procedural ethics that even with the most ingenious effort procedural rationality cannot generate ethical accounts without distortion. To do so requires a focus of accountability which cannot be established, let alone sustained and extended, sheerly procedurally.

Nevertheless, ethical proceduralists plunge on undeterred. The Speech Communication Association recently published a "legislative platform" purporting to protect and promote what was flatly described as "peaceful expression by any communicative means available." Questions as to what does and does not constitute "expression," what forms of it are genuinely "peaceful" or which sorts of means are and are not genuinely "communicative" were not anticipated. The platform allowed that democracy requires "open, vigorous and responsible communication" as if those qualifications were sufficiently definitive to be practicable. The platform drew the line at communication causing harm that is "direct, immediate, irreparable and serious,"[16] and here too begged some ethically significant questions--practical questions of describing the authoritative ways of accounting for how these criteria might apply in particular instances.

Even so sensitive a critic as Franklyn Haiman, completing his brilliant study of the ramifying complexities of First Amendment and of the intricacies of its interpretation and application, simply stated his basic principles:

> I) Unless the harm done by an act of communication is direct, immediate, irreparable, and of a serious material nature, the remedy in a free society should be more speech. The law is an inappropriate tool for dealing with expression which produces mental distress or whose targets are the beliefs and values of an audience.

II) Unless deprived of free choice by deception, physical coercion, or an impairment of normal capacities, individuals in a free society are responsible for their own behavior. The are not objects which can be triggered into action by symbolic stimuli but human beings who decide how they will respond to the communication they see and hear.

III) So long as there is a free marketplace of ideas, where the widest possible range of information and alternatives is available, individuals will be the best judges of their own interests. The law is properly used to enrich and expand that communications marketplace and to insure that it remains an open system.

IV) Government in a free society is the servant of the people and its powers should not be used to inhibit, distort, or dominate public discourse. There must be compelling justification whenever the government requires unwilling communication of its people or withholds information in its possession from them. 17

The principles were simply stated as if the ways of their rationality --of reasoning with such wrigglingly motile moral notions as "direct", "immediate", "irreparable", "serious", "free choice", "deception", "coercion", "widest possible", "information", "inhibit", "distort", "dominate" "compelling justification", and "unwilling communication"--were sufficiently intelligible and practicable so as to constitute a critical community within which agents could be held accountable for their persuasive acts.

But to move the ethical question from theory into practical criticism is to go beyond the procedural focus on decision to see how the recognition and description of ethical situations, their envisioning, are integral for coherent accounts of decision. It is to discover how such matters raise practical problems for procedural rationality, problems of vision and character. These problems can only become open to critical analysis and reasoned debate by reference to some authoritative, audience-implying and community-constituting narrative. Thus for critical purposes it may be interesting to modify Walter Fisher's

seminal opposition to explore not "narrative" vs "rationality", but "narrative" vs "procedural rationality" as paradigms for ethical thought and talk.

It may even be an overstatement to consider this as a strict opposition, as McGee and Nelson have cautioned. Rather, as they point out,[18] narrative might be invoked for its unique power to communicate procedure, to make it more clearly intelligible and practicable than single words or categorical claims by themselves ever could. But I do not present narrative as an interesting supplement to any set of ethical rules. Rather the procedural disposition to invoke ethical rules in itself implies a narrative, critically impoverishing narrative.

It is the story of moral agents being able to discern and maintain a position external to their particular commitments and cares from which they may objectively view the decisions that may confront us, with no dispute necessary over their indisputable descriptions of facts and no dispute possible over their "freely" (by which is meant "unaccountably") chosen value preferences. From this position they may umpire human conflicts with indifferent procedures, procedures that claim to be just precisely insofar as they "do not share a conception of the good by reference to which the fruition of their powers or even the satisfaction of their desires can be evaluated."[19] As ethicist Bernard Williams contends, in this "midair position" no moral thought is possible, since our commitments and cares are the very lifeblood of any morality.[20] Put another way, by stepping back from the distinctive and characterizing facts and decisions we see to be confronting us, we obscure the necessary and close connection of what we ought to do in given instances to what we want to be as a practic

ing moral agent.[21] We impoverish our moral life of the character from which it derives its distinctive meaning and rationale, its accountability. I contend that ethical criticism ought instead to focus its accounts on a competing sort of narrative: stories of character and community.

Part II:
Ethical Accountability as Narrative Ability

> In a world of flux, where self and culture are in a process of continuous and reciprocal change, the ground of judgment on which we can best rely is the ground we make with each other when we talk. Our sense of character and relation is in the end the firmest foundation of value and basis of criticism.
>
> --James Boyd White

1) Moral Language and Vision

The narrative implicit in procedural ethics is a distortive, deceptive one. It denies its own status as story; it is, paradoxically, the story that we are free precisely insofar as we have no authoritative story. Thus it obscures our dependence on story as the source of the powers of attention and intention that are necessary to accountable[22] moral agency and freedom. Yet this story might yet be able to make sense, might yet have the linguistic powers necessary for descriptively adequate accounts, under certain conditions: if we live the moral lives of Rawls's parties in the "original position" behind the veil of ignorance; if we were detached from our own stories and characters, left only with unaccountable preferences to make choices without respect to any meaning our particularity might give them; if as moral agents we inhabited a world of facts existing and having their moral noteworthiness entirely apart from us, facts strewn as it

were across human experience like seashells, each available for human beings to stumble upon with their perception; if there were no accountable public language except that competent to describe these facts, purely descriptive and never evaluative language; if the moral life consisted primarily of privately and unaccountably formed moral notions; if the "value judgments" forming such notions were chosen arbitrarily; in short, if there were not, nor could there be any articulable relation between the Is and Ought in human experience; then individual decisions naturally would become the touchstones of morality, since it would be by our decisions that we arbitrarily created values and became committed to our unaccountable preferences.[23] Then ethical criticism might focus on decision simply to focus its accounts, a focus for which procedures might suffice.

But a contemporary philosopher of action, Julius Kovesi, points out a radical hitch in this procedural view of moral language. The attention of the agent and the moral notions that incite, shape, attenuate and direct that attention--his moral vision--are necessary preconditions for the situation to be recognized as calling for decision in the first place. The vision constituted by our moral notions is temporally and logically prior to decision, since without "our moral notions there would be nothing to make decisions about; there would not even be a need to make decisions."[24] Before ethics can ever be about a decision, it already must involve the practical vision in terms of which we bring that decision into focus, the narrative in which a situation has the substantive significance to be recognized as calling for a decision in the first place. Thus our substantive moral notions are not unaccountable constructs of our "value judgments", but rather

are public and accessible in quite the same way as are more descriptive terms, and they no more violate procedural impartiality than the descriptive terms do. We do not come to see and know and decide about and act on the world through arbitrary atomistic ideas, separated from reality and somehow randomly acquired; instead "we come to know and act on the world as we learn to use our language."[25] Our moral notions, descriptive and evaluative, gain their meaning and force because they play a part in a whole way of life, including a life in language, and that way of life may become an object of reasoned criticism. That is to say, our moral vision orders our lives into the world and our talk about it; learning to give compelling accounts of those lives requires learning a particular way of living, and beginning to practice it in language. We continuously are shaped by the ways of life we talk our way into and the ways of talk we live our way into.

Perhaps the significance of Kovesi's point can be illustrated by examining the apparently straightforward rationalist and procedural distinction between the way we use substantively evaluatively terms and the way we use ostensibly purely descriptive terms. The substantive notion of, say, "freedom" seems logically different from the more descriptive notion of, say, a "podium". The former is clearly a complex construct of our value judgments, when the latter seems simply to be a term of denotation and description. We tend to think that notions like "podium" are clear, distinct, unambiguous. We assume that we can and do know what a podium is because it can be immediately so perceived. In contrast, the notion of freedom seems more tentative

and ambiguous because it does not denote an object open to immediate perception.

But this contrast overlooks the great difficulty philosophers have traditionally had with notions like "podium". Philosophers have pointed to the problem that it is impossible simply to perceive an object as a "podium"; what our sense perceive of the object are qualities given to our senses as hardness, smoothness, shape, size, color. But many objects that could never pass for a "podium" have just those sensory qualities, while other objects of different shapes, textures and sizes might still in the end be entitled to be regarded as podiums. There certainly does not seem to be much of a case that we construct our notion of "podium" out of perceptible qualities.

Rather, even our notion of "podium" is both descriptive and irretrievably evaluative, inextricably both. It arises out of the larger narrative of our way of life, arises out of the particular needs and uses we have for a podium, embedded in our social conventions to speak publicly, to stand when speaking, to use notes, to lean on the podium for support and reassurance, or to pound it for effect, and so on. "Podium" cannot be effectively understood or used in our practice of speech apart from such social conventions in the context of our way of life.[26] "Freedom" similarly depends on concepts that arise from our social conventions, concepts of proper and improper authority, mutual restraint and individual autonomy for example. So "freedom" and "podium" order our world in much the same way: as we learn what may and may not be called a "podium" and how we are and are not to use a podium, or as we learn in the same way to recognize proper authority

but chafe at impositions on our autonomy, we are learning to talk our way into our world even as we live our way into our talk.

The upshot of this is that an adequate ethical account of a decision to use particular words, be they more like "freedom" or more like "podium", or to use them in a particular way, can never merely be an account of a discrete authorial decision or action. Any choice and use of words entails a certain substantive perspective, a vision of the world. "Vision" means nothing more cosmic or complicated than the particular way of giving intelligible, more or less compelling or decisive accounts to its implied audience, especially the language in which to account for action--the value-laden language of description in terms of which the situation could be recognized as calling for a moral decision,[27] alternatives could be formulated and compared, and reasons could be articulated for the choice. The language of ethical description is not "objective", but value-ladden, with descriptions continuously woven from evaluation and evaluation informed by description. The vision's powers description and evaluation are thus mutually informed and implicated.

Here moral language can be seen to entail character. "Our character is our deliberate disposition to use a certain range of reasons for our actions rather than others (such a range is usually what is meant by moral vision) for it is by having reasons and forming our actions accordingly that our character is at once revealed and molded."[28] But as is easy to overlook, "character", like "self", is a relational term. It makes sense only in terms of the community that is the implicit audience for such reasons. A certain moral vision entails a corresponding way of life in language; it tells and extends

the story of that way of life by engaging its audience in seeing and accounting for things through its eyes and language. Thus as adequate ethical criticism would have to account not only for a discrete decision or action, but also for the kind of person one has to be in order to recognize the situation as calling for a decision among a particular set of meaningful alternatives, and for the kind of community that must be constituted in discourse for the decision or action to be accountable and for the account to be authoritative, compelling, decisive.

2) Character and Accountability

This shift of ethical focus has advantages for criticism, some of which are already being explored. Much of the work done so far has concentrated on literature[29], as might be predicted from its narrative emphasis. But at least one significant foray has been made into the ethical criticism of public argument, Edwin Black's "The Second Persona". Black anticipates many of the fundamental premises from which this essay moves: first of all, that "the moral evaluation of rhetorical discourse is a subject that achieves and merits attention," and moreover that it is a subject that admits of reasoned critical argument; that moral judgments are indeed appropriate, even for the apparently simply descriptive task of sorting out history's "awesome garbage heap of facts," in order to "make decisions about perspective"; that moral judgments also involve the critic in shaping "decisively one's relationship to the object judged."[30] The ethical aim of Black's ethical criticism is similar too, in its emphasis on human character as the focus of moral accounts: he aims to "explicate the saliently human dimensions of a discourse," for "if we could, in a

sense, discover for a complex linguistic formulation a corresponding form of character--we should then be able to subsume that discourse under a moral order."[31] But Black's perspective on matters of description and evaluation differs, and that difference is put into question by the narrative theory of moral vision and moral language.

When Black examines the uses of an ethically suspect rhetoric--the Radical Right's uses of "the cancer of communism"--he feels obligated to support extensively his description of the uses, as if some matters of description required critical argument. But in support of his subsequent ethical evaluation, he offers only this straightforward assertion:

> What moral judgment may we make of this metaphor and of discourse that importantly contains it? The judgment seems superfluous, not because it is elusive, but because it is so clearly implied. The form of consciousness to which the metaphor is attached is not one that commends itself. It is not one that a reasonable man would freely choose, and he would not choose it because it does not compensate him with either prudential efficacy or spiritual solace for the anguished exactations it demands. [32]

However painstakingly text-based some matters of description must be, evaluation on the other hand may take place through a perspective that the critic brings to the text, imposes on it by his private choice from the outside rather than it being warranted in some publicly examinable way by the text; it is flatly asserted; for purposes of ethical criticism it is not to be treated as a matter that admits of reasoned critical discourse; and more important for further critical practice, Black's ethical criticism suggests nothing about how such discourse, with its evaluative perspectives flatly asserted, should be sustained and extended, what would be recognized as authoritative

within that discourse, how its decisions would be made or even how the occasion for decision would be recognized.

For Black, evaluation works differently, separately from simple description. But as Kovesi showed, matters of description are not so simple, and matters of evaluation so unaccountable distinct. One complication, a crucial one for ethical criticism, is identified by James Boyd White: "since we are all products of our own culture, from what position can we possibly claim to make value judgments about it, about other cultures, or about the contributions a particular writer makes to his culture, whatever it is?"[33] Black's ethical perspective reveals a good deal about him, a good deal that many of us may admire. But with respect to the text, Black is less revealing. It is not clear why his perspective is required or how it is warranted or called for by the text. It is not clear why his imposition of perspective--at least in critically tougher calls and more complex cases than the relatively uncontroversial ones Black examines--could not be dismissed as a kind of critical cultural imperialism, perhaps a complacent and conventional establishment rationalism imposed on the text.

But how could a particular evaluative perspective be warranted by a text? What, beyond a critic's undefended assertion, could justify any perspective's claim to be authoritative? The clue lies in what we know about the connections between description and evaluation in moral language: that any language use implies a moral and linguistic vision, in which the powers of description and evaluation are thus mutually informed and implicated. This is proper focus for ethical criticism.

> The true center of value in a text, its most important meaning is to be found in the community that it establishes with its reader. It is here that the author offers his reader a place to stand, a place from which he can observe and judge the character and events of the world he creates. Indeed, the world itself. 34

Ethical criticism finds its most accountable focus in the story of the "textural community" the author forms with his or her reader in each text.[35] Ethical perspective need not be imposed from the outside by the critic; nor need it be bound, in any culturally imperialistic way, even by the language and culture in which the author composed it. Rather the textual community provides, entails critical perspective. The textual community exists in its enactment with its implicit audience, the audience that sees through its vision and understands accounts in terms of its reasons. Textual community is not vicarious, to be observed by the critic from the outside, but enacted, mutually constituted in the act of reading and criticizing.

Criticism can focus on the story of how textual community is "enacted" because every text enacts a community: "whenever we write we define ourselves and another and a relation between us"[36]--a relation with its own patterns of meaning and significance, its own conventions and possibilities of expression to which the text can be held accountable. The relationship constituted with the reader is an active one, asking him to participate in that relation by functioning out of what he has been and is becoming; to realize and emphasize certain of his possibilities of perception, description, evaluation and response; to become the sort of character for whom such a vision and mode of accounting for the world is sufficient and satisfying. The reader is taught "how to read his way into becoming a member of

audience it defines: one who understands each shift of tone, who shares the judgment the text invites him or her to make, and who feels the sentiments proper to the circumstances" as the text leads him or her to see circumstances. Moreover, since "every way of reading is a way of being and acting in the world," the reader is always simultaneously being taught how to live his or her way out from the text, "how to judge our own political communities, their rulers and their policies."[37]

In short the textual community which an author constitutes in his rhetoric is revealed in the ways it discourages, allows, invites, and teaches its reader to engage it, and therein and thereafter, to see and engage the world. The focus for ethical judgment here cannot be flatly stated in procedural terms, for it "is not a new conceptual scheme or new vocabulary." It must be given account in narrating the development of the character of the implicit reader, the person whom the author "leads the reader in fact to become, below the level of language, as he responds to this text."[38]

Narrative ethics concerns not procedures but character and community: "the central idea of justice on this view is a matter not of rules, distributions or correctives but a matter of relations."[39] Thus it focuses its accounts on who we are and who we can be <u>while</u> engaged in textual community is like other human communities, and can be known and judged as they are: not by rules, since from a linguistic point of view considerations of what people ought to <u>be</u> precede and inform considerations of what they ought to do; but rather in terms of the character of the people who constitute them, and the moral vision that constitutes the character. Put another way, such matters of character

and relations point out and put in focus the firmest ground for judging communities the story of the efforts the community sustains to live up to its constitutive convictions.[40]

Part III
Case Studies in Ethical Criticism: The Tilt of Freedom

> Freedom can be coercive by
> the very conception of "choice"
> it provides.
> --Stanley Hauerwas

The contribution of procedural ethics must be acknowledged. They make our civic discourse more open, more inclusive, in that sense more free. Surely we should heed Franklyn Haiman admonition to become the kind of people who prefer navigating the "boisterous sea of liberty" rather than the "calm of despotism."[41] No ethical alternative that rolls back the history of goods achieved and excellences developed in the stories of rhetorical and critical practice could be seen as progress. Inclusiveness in debate is not in question. The issue here is accountability, not <u>whether</u> rhetors like[42] Arthur Butz and Henry Morris are allowed to promulgate their views, but <u>how</u> we should hear and engage them where they do. The aim is not an illiberal--and worse, unrhetorical--vitiation of civic discourse or critical debate, but a way of criticism that sustains those debates and even extends them by extending the accountability with which they decide questions.

But even in that light, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn's charge in his famous 1978 Harvard Commencement Address is disturbing: the American procedural vision of freedom has a disturbing tilt with respect to ethical issues. Our "legalistic life", lived only within procedures and barren of more authoritative or even evocative terms of moral

account, creates a functional "inequality between the freedom for good deeds and the freedom for evil deeds."[43] It is a curious and unfamiliar thought for us to entertain that freedom can threaten freedom. "Freedom" is supposed to be the solution, not the problem, and seldom are we called on to consider the adequacy of our procedural conception of freedom. But the kind of practical problem with the procedurally constituted but otherwise "free" market of ideas that I wish to discuss parallels revealingly a criticism of another sort of free market, Joseph Schumpeter's famous criticism of free market economics.[44]

Schumpeter claimed that what is distinctive of liberal economics is the sheer extent of market freedom. That freedom is uniquely powerful: it allows for success in proportions unapproached by any other economic system. But it is also procedurally neutral, indifferent to the community's character and even to the destruction of those aspects of its character that are necessary conditions of the system's continued success. The ethics of self-sacrifice, deferred gratification and investment are gradually subverted and eventually replaced by a "lifestyle" of consumption, of immediate and unlimitable self-indulgence; in such a community, one comes to see and account for oneself essentially as a consumer, not as a producer. In short, the system is threatened by the very success it promotes, within the conceptions of freedom and accountability that its procedures provide. Its characteristic success not only admits of, but tilts toward the destruction of those aspects of human and community character which are necessary conditions for sustaining and extending the system.

In the same way, our system of public discourse, the free market of ideas, is threatened by the very success it promotes, within the

conceptions of freedom and accountability that its procedures provide. Its characteristic success not only admits of, but tilts toward the destruction of those aspects of human character and community which are necessary conditions for sustaining and extending the system and its accountability. Since our procedural ethics are neutral (or perhaps indifferent) as to substantive point of view, they cannot favor or promote--and so may allow to decline--the qualities of civic debate necessary to sustain and extend it.

Let us consider two contemporary situations in which we have been unable to keep questions decided, let alone advance the conversation. In each situation, procedural ethics are little help in advancing or even sustaining the conversation; it is unclear whether to respond, or how to respond so as to carry the conversation further; it is unclear how to respond so as to carry the conversation further; it is unclear how to invoke on these participants of public debate the appropriate vision and terms of accountability, and no helpful form of ethical criticism is procedurally available.

Consider Arthur Butz[45], one of the new apologist historians of the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews. His denials of any Nazi policy of genocide or even any proportion of Jewish death that would be exceptionable given wartime conditions have a course stirred a great deal of response, including careful refutations[46] diligently invoking the substantive standards of historical rhetorical rhetoric. For historians, most of the questions Butz and his cohorts address remain decided, even though denials of the Holocaust have grown more frequent and aggressive as events recede in time and eyewitnesses pass away.

But in the free market of ideas where the standards of history hold no special authority, a triumphant new legitimacy has been claimed for the "what Holocaust?" position--not because the argument has been given some new and attention-worthy account, not because the argument has been made any better or any differently, but merely because the position is allowed by the procedures of the free market to be raised again and again without any commensurately substantive burden of proof to meet.

Clearly we do not know with unalterable certainty every detail of the Holocaust, its scope, motives and processes, and no history that absolutely precluded the possibility of giving new accounts could be a mode of free inquiry. But what also is clear is that the sort of attention and authority due a historial account has been claimed but not earned by Butz's historical rhetoric. In that, it is clearly a substantive misuse of freedom, the freedom to make historical arguments.

Internal consistency is a basic feature of historical accounts, but for Butz it is the regular victim of argumentative convenience. Butz's proofs particularly turn on inferences, since so few direct records exist. But for inferences to be authoritative, even intelligible, as proof, they must be drawn in some consistent way; if there is no consistent standard of what is required of inferences in order to prove something, it cannot be clear when or in what measure or even if a given inference supports a claim. Butz infers[47] that the bombing of Hiroshima must have actually happened because nobody has to argue for it. But proponents of the Holocaust "hoax" find it necessary again and again to argue that this slaughter of millions of innocents

really occurred. At this point in Butz's logic, these arguments are characterized as having happened frequently, and this frequency is presented as an index of Holocaust implausibility. But earlier, it was expedient for him to characterize literature documenting the Holocaust as meager--but this was not to be taken as a mark of an uncontroversial and therefore accepted truth. Rather, the fact that historians decline to argue this question as much as Butz would prefer becomes evidence of a conspiracy of silence[48] --a silence that now demonstrates the shakiness of the position that the Holocaust happened; at his convenience, Butz regards a body of literature as suggestively massive or suggestively meager. At his convenience Butz wants the lack of contention over a claim to prove its credibility (Hiroshima must have occurred, almost nobody argues against it) or to prove its suspiciousness (almost nobody is arguing against the Holocaust; they must be hiding something).

So long as the community's own procedural ethics (precludes substantive moral notions) in terms of which Butz could be held to account, it sustains a vulnerability that Butz exploits, a damned-if-you-answer, damned-if-you-don't double bind. A response to Butz has the effect of legitimizing his position as once again open for consideration (one might even argue, though it is unnecessary for our purposes, that attention and not persuasion is this rhetoric's ultimate goal). This difficulty was recognized by the executive director of the Chicago Anti-Defamation League, Abbot A. Rosen, when he said of Butz's book

> we have known about it for some time. But we didn't want to give it any publicity and help the sales.

> Now it's too late; it's out in the open and we have to face it squarely.

Rosen's statement is reprinted as the first and most prominent comment on the back cover of Butz's book in its paperback edition.

But failure to respond leaves the apologists unchallenged to do whatever public damage they can. This damage is substantive: surely it damages a community to have to endure passively and without complaint the singling-out of some of its citizens for the purpose of erasing their experience from public regard. It degrades a community to stand by in polite attention as faceless mass horror is compounded by invitations for it to be forgotten, by temptations to banish the dead from history and from the world of human meaning just as they were banished from the earth. It damages the community's capacities for civic discourse to disenfranchise the public memory--a necessary condition, surely, of sustaining and extending the community's rhetorical practice. And the reason we must endure such insults compounding injuries is not because the argument has been given some new and attention-worthy account, not because the argument has been made any better or any differently, but merely because by the procedures of the "free" market of ideas Butz is free to exhume it again and again, without any commensurately substantive burden of accountability to meet, and claim some credibility from the sheer brute fact of these reapparitions.

Or consider some of the arguments advanced under the title Creation Science. Henry Morris, Duane Gish and Walter Lammerts,[49] among others, have attacked the very frames of inquiry within which modern scientific accomplishments have occurred. These arguments have of

course stirred a great deal of response, including careful refutations.[50] These refutations diligently invoke the substantive standards of scientific rhetoric, standards appropriate to the practices of geology, biology, archaeology, astrophysics and other sciences and constitutive of scientific discourse--as distinct in content and in claims on the public from religious discourse--about such matters. For scientists, most of the questions Morris and his cohorts address remain decided, even though creationist arguments have grown more frequent and aggressive as political conditions have grown more populist and scientific accounts have grown more remote.[51]

But in the larger free market of ideas, where the standards of science hold no special authority, a triumphant new legitimacy has been claimed for the creationist position--not because the argument has been given some new and attention-worthy account, not because the argument has been made any differently, but merely by the procedures of the "free" market of ideas creationists are free to raise it again and again without any commensurately substantive burden of accountability to meet.

The issue again is one of "freedom", defined procedurally and not substantively. For instance, when The Fundamentalist Journal devote a special issue to creationist arguments, the issue was entitled "What is Happening to Our Freedom?" The arguments all turn on the same concept: equal rights for equal opinions. "Darwinian", "materialist" and "humanist" sciences are taught in the schools; let creationism have an equal chance, teach it too and let the students choose.[52] But nowhere is it explained how this choice is to be made, and in what way it would be scientific. Nowhere is it explained where students unini-

tiated in scientific disciplines are to get meta-criteria for judging them as science before they have learned what it is to do science. Nor, more concretely, is it explained why, lacking this authority and the means to earn it, their judgment should matter. The decisive answer to a problem in any discipline-let us say mathematics--is not merely an option the students may choose on some extrinsic or ideological ground. No amount of voting among the students can make another answer more adequate for scientific purposes, nor can the brute fact that different students arrive at different results make the decisive answer optional for those with other opinions. To allow that to happen would effectively prevent the teaching of mathematics as an intellectual discipline. Part of what it means to learn math is to understand why this particular answer has a special authority for this problem. Morris's creationism takes up no burden of accountability to explain why scientific instruction should be any different.

Obviously not every claim to scientific knowledge has been decisively established, and no science that absolutely precluded the possibility of giving new accounts could be a mode of free inquiry. But what is apparent again here is that the sort of attention and authority due a scientific account[53] has been claimed by Morris's creationism even though it has not been earned by scientific argument. In that, Morris's scientific rhetoric is clearly a substantive misuse of freedom, the freedom to make scientific arguments.

Sciences by definition base their arguments on natural laws; a case cannot be regarded as "scientific" in the measure that it inaccurately states and partially applies such laws. Henry Morris's Scientific Case for Creation is an attack on "evolution"--the idea that

more highly order forms of life could ever in any way have from less ordered forms. Against that idea, Morris invokes the Second Law of Thermodynamics. But Morris never troubles himself to state the Law--not in properly scientific notation, nor even in intelligible ordinary terms, but only in a partial and misleading quotation cribbed out of context from an article by Isaac Asimov.[54] This omission enables him to fudge the Law for the convenience of his argument. Morris can claim, misleadingly, that according to the Second Law, order constantly runs down to disorder. But the formula for expressing that disorder, S=K log W, is a measure of probability: the sum total order in the universe tends to run down. The Law does not preclude order being built up in, as it were, islands of stability, local pockets of progress. Morris evades some of the bizarre implications of his presentation of the Law because he refuses to recognize relevant conflicting evidence, even when it is as imminent as his own body. The body of the adult human is more, not less ordered than the fertilized egg from which he or she grew; even though each cell has the same nature and amount of genetic information, the body of an adult human is not a gigantic multi-celled egg. The cells differentiate; the body becomes more ordered by incorporating a skeleton, a cardio-vascular system, a nervous system culminating in the brain, and so on. These differentiations, moreover, can be adequately if not entirely explained by the science Morris derides, and must be ignored by the science Morris is hustling.

Instead of producing a positive case based on scientific laws, laws whose meaning and integrity do not vary with his convenience, Morris contents himself instead with identifying anomalies that remain

so far unresolved by--indeed, that were only recognized in--the sciences he snipes at with arguments that amount to no more than a heap of unconnected demands to "explain this one."[55]

So long as the community's own procedural ethics precludes imposing authoritative moral notions in terms of which Morris could be held to account, it sustains a vulnerability that Morris exploits, a damned-if-you-answer, damned-in-you-don't double bind. To debate creationists without being able to hold them accountable to something publicly regarded as science[56] not only concedes them publicity, it seems to confirm in a graphic way the creationist claim that the two positions are equally "valid" as scientific arguments. After all, the different advocates are juxtaposed as equals on the debating platform--side by side, as if listeners could entertain them both in the same way and choose between them as if they provided equally available options; why then may not their positions be treated as equals in the laboratory and the classroom?

Accordingly, many distinguished scientists, including luminaries like Stephen Jay Gould, Ashley Montagu and Carl Sagan, have refused to debate creationists in a calculated effort to deny them publicity. Creationists have responded that the absence of these rhetorical cowards from the debating platform indicates the superior persuasiveness of the creationist position: if even such eminences are afraid to debate, especially inasmuch as Creationism is a prominent public issue again, doesn't that prove how formidable the creationist argument is? Failure to respond leaves the creationists unchallenged to do whatever public damage they can, damage in several different senses. One might predict damaging effects: for example our children will live their

lives in an increasingly scientific and technological world, and our present instruction in these disciplines is not conspicuously superior--it may not even be demonstrably equal--to that of the other nations with whom we compete ideologically and economically. In that measure, we are reduced to having curriculum and classroom decisions subjected to the politicking of scientific ignoramuses. The creationist prospect is that scientific instruction may be compelled to give over an "equal" share of its already limited time to "sciences" who have claimed that status without a single discovery, invention, or contribution--but simply on their unearned say-so, and our procedural inability to require more.

But more substantial rhetorical damage may occur in the rhetorical exchange itself. We become unwilling allies in shaking the argumentative authority of these disciplines of inquiry which are, more and more, necessary conditions of sustaining the community's conversation with itself and the world.

The reason we must endure such assaults on the community and its capacities for conversation is not because the arguments has been made any better or any differently, but merely because the position is allowed by the procedures of the free market of ideas to be raised again and again, without any commensurately substantive burden of accountability to meet.

But a narratively focused ethical criticism would have different powers to sustain and extend our capacities to hold each other accountable: in contrast to all our procedural inability to hold creationists and Holocaust apologists accountable for the type of author-

ity they claim over our community, it is both revealing and more genuinely engaging to raise such questions systematically of them.

Creationism can be held accountable to explicate the shared vision that its textural resources are deployed to create, and correspondingly the perspectives that are limited, distorted or eliminated. Henry Morris might be held to account for the text's way of maintaining its own resources, those by which it supports to engage its audience: the resources of science. He might be held to account for the clarity with which, in the handling of these resources, his text recognizes and builds upon, sustains its own past and that of the community of discourse. Specifically, how can the scientific world include those with no belief or a less literal belief in the Bible? What can be done by one who speaks and acts within the world invoked and constituted by this rhetoric, and what cannot? For instance, what foundation for a systematic science is available beyond the unordered and undisciplined heaping of anomalies and unexplained particulars? What has been built on that foundation so fa? What are the pivotal terms of description and value working in this discourse, and how are they entailed in and justified by the constitution of this community as audience? For example, how roughly may we state physical law and still be practicing science?

Holocaust apologist history might be held accountable to explicate the kinds of interactions between author and audience it permits and prohibits, the kinds of shifts and transitions it passes unquestioned or dismisses as unworthy of answer. Specifically when and how may what is presented as extensive commentary on one page become meagre literature on the next? On what ground and with how much

explication? What kinds of evidence does it advance as unanswerable, what is unnecessary to answer? For instance why, after all the extensive demographic arguments and all the elaborate persona anecdotes, is it not possible and not necessary to respond to the remark popularly attributed to Hannah Arendt that notwithstanding all the elaborate calculations and explanations millions of Jews still seem to be missing. If they remain unaccounted for, who is to be held accountable?

Both positions can be held accountable--and we might be held similarly accountable in responding--for the extent to which the authors are responsible to the same standards of argument to which the audiences are invited and held accountable, and the extent to which the audience has access to the patterns of authoritative argument the author may invoke. Does the speaker pass the same tests by which he grades and dismisses his rivals and competitors?

This point should not be lost, for in this criticism the character of the critic is also engaged. This is ethical criticism in the subtle sense that it engages even the ethical critic himself or herself in the textual and critical communities and in sustaining and extending their accountability, their capacity to give authoritative, compelling, even decisive accounts.

To be concerned about accountability in this way is assuredly not to affirm complacently that our established intellectual methods and institutions are perfect or even adequate in their present form. On the contrary, accountability--the capacity to tell our stories with appropriate and evocative reference to the meanings, goods, satisfactions, excellences and ends partly constitutive of that accountability

--is inherently a push to improve those methods and institutions. It actually invites and facilitates their extension.

Disputes with the creationists, for instance, turn on basic questions about the frame of science, about which scientists haven't been reflecting effectively--at least in public--for years. In debates with creationists, scientists haven't fared all that well because many of the issues and data with which they are confronted attach to issues fundamental to science in earlier centuries, particularly the seventeenth (the relation and movement of earth and sun, the phlogiston theory) and the nineteenth (the Flood and its geological ramifications). What creationism could engage scientists in doing is to rethink these matters seriously enough to account for them to the public more compellingly, making the continuity of science clearer. Along the way, it may even be possible--perhaps not envisionable from here, but nonetheless possible--that evolutionary biology or astrophysics or plate tectonics will have to be radically altered or even scrapped; after all, it was a crucial turn in the progress of science when we scrapped alchemy. But what made sense of that turn, what made it accountable, was how it fit into the story of scientific practice at that point; how it was a consistent, foreshadowed, satisfying and therefore accountable development of our search for scientific rigor and insight. For us to abandon any of our present sciences will require similar consistency with and extension of the purposes and excellences and human achievements for which our community does science.

Similarly, we may also entertain historical arguments challenging our knowledge of the Holocaust. We must hold their arguments, and our

own, accountable to the story of the practice of doing history. Doing history is a practice that developed its capacities of gathering and disposing evidence and of making and controlling inference from Herodotus to Thucydides to Gibbon to Toynbee and so on. Changes in the way we view the events of the Holocaust must be held to make sense, to be accountable in terms of the story of historical practice. Although such changes remain possible, it's hard to envision them form here. But at least arguments about the 6 or 5 or 4 million slaughtered may provide perspective for chronicling the various genocides of this bloody century: Stalin's 10 million, or the unnumbered slaughter in Campuchea.

Accountability to the story of a community of discourse constituted by a practice like science or history, far from shackling debate, encourages and empowers it, frees it even more fully. In this, criticism itself may claim status as a substantive human practice. Certainly it shows brighter prospects for meeting the more rigorous requirements of that status:

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. 57

Rhetoric as a practice of accountability is designed to keep the conversation focused, to keep it continually developing its capacities to give compelling and decisive accounts, for "what is distinctive of a practice is in part the way in which conceptions of the relevant goods and ends...are transformed and enriched by these extensions of human

powers" and are "transmuted by the history of the activity."[58] But what makes this new accountability possible in the first place, what continuously enhances its authority, and what makes all of this ethical is a shift in the focus of ethical criticism from procedural rationality to the narratives of vision and character in these communities of discourse.

In this paper I hope to have shown that the narrative paradigm admits of ethical criticism. But this criticism works from an ethics different from the procedural, an ethics that only makes sense in a rational world paradigm of communication. For this ethics, the stories of character are central. Only in terms of such a story are decisions accountable, only in its moral vision could they have their meaning and rationale. In the narrative paradigm, "accountability" transforms from an empty procedural concept into a community's capacity to generate ethically compelling accounts. Put another way, in the narrative vision and language of character in community, the ethical dimension of texts can be objects of analysis genuinely open to debate in a way that sustains and extends the community of discourse and its critical capacities to hold texts and the characters they realize compellingly accountable.

1. Walter R. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," Communication Monographs 51 (March 1984) 1-22. Fisher's contributions in introducing narrative to rhetorical theory; see also Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration," Communication Monographs 52 (December 1985) 347-367; "The Narrative Paradigm: In the Beginning," Journal of Communication 35 (Autumn 1985), #4, 74-89. Fisher's earlier work clearly contributed to building the paradigm; see especially "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons," The Quarterly Journal of Speech 64 (1978) 376-384, and "Rationality and the Logic of Good Reasons," Philosophy and Rhetoric 13, 121, 130.

   There have been other estimable contributions to the elaboration of the narrative paradigm. W. Lance Bennett, "Political Scenarios and the Nature of Politics," Philosophy and Rhetoric 8 23-42; Bennett, "Storytelling and Criminal Trials: A Model of Social Judgment," The Quarterly Journal of Speech 64, 1-22; Bennett and Martha S. Feldman, Reconstructing Reality in the Courtroom: Justice and Judgment in American Culture (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1981; Bennett and Murray Edelman, "Towards a New Political Narrative," Journal of Communication 35 (Autumn 1985) 128-138. In some ways the narrative approach suggested here is congenial with parts of Bormann's "fantasy theme analysis" without necessarily being committed to its psychological assumptions and ethical implications. See E. G. Bormann, The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985). Thomas B. Farrell, "Narrative in Natural Discourse: on Conversation and Rhetoric," Journal of Communication 35 (Autumn 1985), 109-127; Thomas S. Frentz and Thomas B. Farrell, "Language-action: a Paradigm for Communication," The Quarterly Journal of Speech 62, 333-349. John Louis Lucaites and Celeste Michelle Condit, "Reconstructing Narrative Theory: A Functional Perspective," Journal of Communication 35 (Autumn, 1985) 139-155. Narrative may offer a useful corrective where McGee's ideographic approach may fail to account completely for anomalies within specifically American practices--for example, anomalies of the sort examined with such broad critical notice in Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1985).

2. Abrams v. United States 250 US 616 (1919)

3. Schenk v. United States 249 US 47 (1919)

4. Butler v. Michigan 352 US 380 (1957). For this reason the Court has moved to limit even many sorts of libel and slander judgments; for a specific discussion see Nat Hentoff, The First Freedom: The Tumultuous History of Free Speech in America (New York: Laurel Press, 1980) 255-283. See also Franklyn S. Haiman, Freedom of Speech (Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1976), 59-107, and Haiman, Speech and Law in a Free Society

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 43-60; and Robert M. O'Neil, Free Speech: Responsible Communication Under Law (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966) 27-47, 80-97.

5. Walter Lippmann, "The Indispensable Opposition," in The Norton Reader, Authur M. Eastman general editor, fifth edition (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1980), 925.

6. See for example Ruth McGaffey, "A Critical Look at the Marketplace of Ideas," Speech Teacher 21 (1972), 115-122. McGaffey argues persuasively that the free market does not exist insofar as certain classes have inherently more access to the instruments of mass communication which dominate the market. Typically, her solution is described and characterized not as any regulation of the market, but in effect an expansion of it, a wider opening, an even fuller and more inclusive freedom.

7. Whitney v. California 274 US 357 (1927)

8. Dennis G. Day, "The Ethics of Democratic Debate," Central States Speech Journal 17 (1966), 5, 6.

9. Day, "Ethics of Democratic Debate," 7. My italics.

10. Day, "Ethics of Democratic Debate," 9-10.

11. Thomas R. Nilsen, Ethics of Speech Communication, second edition (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), 45, 72.

12. See Stanley Hauerwas's discussion of the linguistic nature of vision and its significance for ethics in Vision and Virtue (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides Publishers, 1974), 30-47.

13. John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1971), 136-137, 137.

14. Robert Paul Wolff, Understanding Rawls (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 97. For a criticism of Rawls's ethics on the ground that his procedures fail to deal adequately with moral desert, see Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 229-234. Ronald Beiner criticizes Rawls's contention that there is no way of arbitrating between "thick" (that is, substantive) theories of the good on the ground that we give definition to conceptions of human good by telling stories and we have the capacity to discriminate "between stories that are rich and penetrating, and those that are colorless and superficial," that is the capacity for weighing the truth of narrative. Even where narratives fail to satisfy, what is sought is not so much strictly deductive inference, but rather a deeper and richer filling out of the story told. Ronald Beiner, Political

Judgment (London: Methuen and Company Ltd., 1983) 1-26. See also Beiner's criticism of Habermas's ethics of communication, 25-30.

15. MacIntyre, After Virtue, 195.

16. Speech Communication Association, "Legislative Platform," Spectra, May 1986, 3.

17. Haiman, Speech and Law in a Free Society, 425-426.

18. McGee and Nelson, "Narrative Reason in Public Argument," 139-140, 150.

19. Rawls, A Theory of Justice, 327.

20. Bernard Williams, Morality: an Introduction to Ethics (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 29-39.

21. On this, compare Stanley Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 18-21, to William Frankena's unexamined assumption that "what ought I (or we) to do?" is primary. William Frankena, Ethics second edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 12.

22. The most provocative recent study of how the story of individualism leaves Americans unable to account adequately for the moral commitments that they nonetheless have freely chosen and continue freely to affirm beneath the level of procedural language is Bellah et al, Habits of the Heart.

23. This adapts analysis by Stanley Hauerwas in Vision and Virtue, 13. My debt to Hauerwas is obvious throughout this essay. Two further critiques of the "factual" view of man and morality are Iris Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," Yale Review, LIII (March 1964), and Murdoch, "Against Dryness: a Polemical Sketch," Encounter XVI (January, 1961).

24. Julius Kovesi, Moral Notions (New York: Humanities Press, 1967), 111.

25. As Hauerwas observes, this point can also be argued in terms of the possibilities of describing an action. See also Eric D'Arcy, Human Acts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

26. It may be useful to speculate about the sensible qualities of those different things that might count as a podium in the context of a society that never expressed itself for public purposes in speech--individuals expressing themselves by, say, interpretive dance instead--or spoke only in seated or reclining postures.

27. It is important not to underestimate the descriptive powers of a language even at the usually overlooked stage of recognizing that the problem calls for a decision in the first place: "the description under which the decision is proposed is as important as the decision itself. For the description frames the decision." Stanley Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom, 124.

28. Stanley Hauerwas, Vision and Virtue, 59.

29. Stanley Eugene Fish, Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1967). Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). Wayne C. Booth, "'The Way I Loved George Eliot': Friendship with Books as a Neglected Critical Metaphor" Kenyon Review 2 (1980), 4-27.

30. Edwin Black, "The Second Persona," The Quarterly Journal of Speech 56 (April 1970), 109-119; anthologized in James R. Andrews, editor, The Practice of Rhetorical Criticism (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1983), 131-141.

31. Black, "The Second Persona," in Andrews, The Practice of Rhetorical Criticism, 132.

32. Black, "The Second Persona," in Andrews, The Practice of Rhetorical Criticism, 140.

33. James Boyd White, When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitutions of Language, Character and Community (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 13.

34. White, When Words Lose Their Meaning, 17.

35. White, When Words Lose Their Meaning, 13.

36. White, When Words Lose Their Meaning, 276.

37. White, When Words Lose Their Meaning, 16, 21, 18.

38. White, When Words Lose Their Meaning, 281.

39. White, When Words Lose Their Meaning, 283.

40. Note here how fundamentally at odds the procedural and narrative conceptions of moral freedom must be. For proceduralists, as Rawls's "veil of ignorance" suggests, we are free to the extent that we have no authoritative story. By contrast, narratives are to be judged precisely in terms of their sufficiency to form and account for one's character, direction, intentionality, and Telos. From the narrative point of view, to be an agent is to be able to locate one's action in the ongoing history of a specific community of language users, in terms of which history one has

one's fundamental moral powers of attention and intention. It is in light of these different definitions that Stanley Hauerwas's remark "freedom can be coercive by the very conception of 'choice' it provides" gains force. Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character 80.

41. Haiman, Speech and Law in a Free Society, 429. Haiman's reference to the "boisterous sea of liberty" is from a letter of Thomas Jefferson to Phillip Mazzei, 24 April 1796. J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton editor, The Best Letters of Thomas Jefferson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1926), 85.

42. Creationism and Holocaust history are by no means the only apparitions of such rhetorical problems. I have argued elsewhere ("In Search of Firmer Ground: The Problem for Ethics of Rhetoric in Liberal Democracy," Southern Speech Communication Association, March 1982; "The Narrativity of Public Discourse: Constitutive Fiction and Ethical Criticism," Modern Language Association, December 1985; "The Narrative Ground of Rhetoric: Toward Ethical Criticism," in submission to the Journal of Social and Biological Sciences) that the argumentative reapparitions of Richard Nixon pose this sort of ethical double-bind for politics in a particularly excruciating way, a way particularly indicting of liberal democracy's procedural ethics.

43. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "A World Split Apart," Vital Speeches of the Day, 1 September 1978, XLIV, #22, 680. It may seem peculiar to invoke Solzhenitsyn as a critic of American public argument; his peculiar interest for our ethical purposes is that it is the brunt of his charge against the West's liberal democracies that a polity is ultimately to be judged by the kind of people it produces, and that from such a perspective we can only be found wanting:

> The complex and deadly crush of life has produced stronger, deeper and more interesting personalities than those generated by standardized Western well-being. Therefore if our society were to transformed into yours, it would mean an improvement in certain aspects, but also a change for the worse on some particularly significant points. Of course, a society cannot remain in an abyss of lawlessness as is the case in our country. But it is also demeaning for it to stay on such a soulless and smooth plane of legalism as is the case in yours. After the suffering of decades of violence and oppression, the human soul longs for things higher, warmer and purer than those offered by today's mass living habits, introduced as by a calling card by the revolting invasion of commercial advertising, by TV stupor and by intolerable music.

"A World Split Apart," 681. One criticism of Solzhenitsyn is that he remains too tied to Russia and Russia nationalism; see Andrei Sinyavsky, "Solzhenitsyn and Russian Nationalism," New York Review of Books 26/18 (November 22, 1979), 3-6. Solzhenit-

syn is also criticized for having failed to understand the nature of freedom and democracy; see Sidney Hook, "Solzhenitsyn and Western Freedom," World Literature Today, Autumn 1979, 573-578. He is also accused of misunderstanding the moral status of pluralism; see Martin Marty, "On Hearing Solzhenitsyn in Context," Commonwealth 105/17 (September 1, 1978), 553-555; and James M. Wall, "Solzhenitsyn's Harvard Sermon," The Christian Century, September 20, 1978, 843-844. Time magazine compiled brief responses to the question "Is Solzhenitsyn Right?" from Charles Frankel, Theodore Hesburgh, Archibald MacLeish, Daniel J. Boorstin, George Meany, Sidney Hook, Jerzy Kosinski and Barbara Tuchman in its 26 June 1978 issue. See also Stanley Hauerwas's discussion in A Community of Character, 74-83.

44. Joseph Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942).

45. Arthur Butz, The Hoax of the Twentieth Century (Surrey, England: Historical Review Press, 1976).

46. Two distinguished and accessible works of refutation and documentation are Phillip Friedman, Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980), and Lucy Dawidowicz, The Holocaust and the Historians (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981).

47. Butz, Hoax, 339.

48. Butz, Hoax, 248.

49. Henry M. Morris, The Scientific Case for Creation (San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1977); Henry M. Morris and Duane Gish, The Battle for Creation (San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1976); Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb, The Genesis Flood (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1961); Duane T. Gish, Evolution? The Gossils Say NO!! (San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1973); Walter E. Lammerts, editor, Why Not Creation? (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970).

50. Two distinguished and accessible works of scientific refutation are Niles Eldridge, The Monkey Business (New York: Washington Square Press, 1982), and Ernst Mayr, The Growth of Biological Thought (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1982).

51. I mean "remote" in three senses. First, the relative complexity of what needs to be explained has increased exponentially without a corresponding increase in the level of popular scientific literacy. Second, science is farther removed from people's everyday lives: discoveries comparable to, say, those achieved by all those eighteenth-century home experiments in electricity with a kite, a key and some twine from the cupboard can no longer be attempted; nor are the applications of our discoveries--nuclear

power, for example--as visibly and unambiguously good for the way we live now as, say, the lightening rod was. Finally, though we have funded more and more of the work of science from the public purse, scientists as a group have not seen it as part of their duty--as scientists, or as citizens--to increase correspondingly their efforts to make their work intelligible.

52. A provocative array of creationist arguments is collected in The Fundamentalist Journal, 2, #7, July/August 1983.

53. John Lyne and Henry F. Howe have argued in "Punctuated Equilibria: Rhetorical Dynamics of a Scientific Controversy," The Quarterly Journal of Speech 72 (132-147, that the issue of how much and what kind of scientific authority is due in particular cases is even more complicated in that "distinct fields of discourse complicate communication within the sciences." (133) Since researchers within different fields hold different assumptions, experts may alternately play roles of authorities and naifs as they venture beyond their own "vanishingly narrow" specialties. The precise degrees of authority due different scientific arguments are thus difficult to specify even for expert audiences, let alone for the general public who have no clear way of distinguishing between competing expertise; there is "no simple way for a curious public to demarcate expert from non-expert discourse." (133) But as their analysis of creationist arguments affirms, whatever the difficulties of determining the degree and kind of authority due scientific arguments, they do not justify the indiscriminant inclusion of baldly unscientific arguments as equal alternatives. The solution for complicated intellectual problems is more discriminating thought, not less.

54. Isaac Asimov, "Can Decreasing Entropy Exist in the Universe?" Science Digest May 1973, 76. See Morris's discussion, Scientific Case for Creation, 11-26.

55. This parallels Lyne and Howe's charge that Duane Gish uses "a logic of 'if they're wrong, we must be right.'" "Punctuated Equilibria," 140. Lyne and Howe concede the public persuasiveness of such argument: "The claim that evolutionary science is in disarray is at least far more accessible to the public, than the subtleties of allopatric speciation." (141) Even so, "evolutionary biology seems undisturbed." (142) Lyne and Howe's analysis of Stephen Gould's "Rhetorical Bind" (141) parallels my analysis of the double bind of our public discourse; their call for "the new rhetoric of science to clarify the shifting frameworks to which scientific discourses of public interest should be held publicly accountable" (144) also bears similarities to my search for a public accountability.

56. There is not a single "creation science" argument published in any independent scientific journal of any of these disciplines. Creationists interpret this as evidence of a conspiracy. But even attributing the basest of motives, given the financial con-

dition of almost every academic journal and the likely marketability of any creationist argument that would stand serious reading, it's at least curious that nothing has reached print with independent publishers. It seems in this light a more probable account, of the phenomenon and of the scientific community, that creations have either failed or refused to try to be accountable to the community of science. It is for this reason that I have characterized their claims to be making scientific arguments to be unearned.

57. MacIntyre, After Virtue, 175.

58. MacIntyre, After Virtue, 180, 181.